

Visibility, Authority, and Growth: A Guide to Better Marketing for IT Service Firms

Part 1: Optimizing Website Copy and Solution Briefs
by Charles Comenos

Visibility, Authority, and Growth: A Guide to Better Marketing for IT Service Firms

Part 1: Optimizing Website Copy and Solution Briefs

Introduction

There is a great deal of marketing and copywriting information available on the Internet, but little of it is written specifically with the needs of IT service firms in mind. This guide is an attempt to remedy that problem. We've combined our ten years of professional copywriting experience for top IT companies with established best practices and advice from experts and luminaries in the field. Best luck with your marketing!

Clarify Your Place in the Market

Meet with your team and take stock of what brought you together in the first place. This is a crucial step in ensuring that your marketing campaign or content will yield results. Ask yourselves, what does my ideal customer look like? What service am I trying to offer them? What do I know about their buying journey? What obstacles are preventing me from making more sales? These questions are doubly important for companies that have not yet started to take their marketing seriously yet.

Sounds basic? You'd be amazed how many IT service firms fail to develop this solid initial vision of who they're trying to reach with a marketing campaign. What usually follows is an unfocused marketing effort that doesn't position the firm as a solution to specific set of problems belonging to a specific target customer. The mixed results that often follow can cause frustration and angst.

Have an answer to these questions? Great, let's use that information to start optimizing the most fundamental elements in your marketing artillery, your website and solution briefs.

A Website that Defines That Position

The old adage about dressing for the job you want and not the job you have applies just as much to building a great company website as it does to choosing the right belt or shoes.

What I mean to say is your website should not just be reflection of where your company is at the moment, but a signpost that indicates what you want to be and who you want to be serving. It should target all of your desired clients and deliver them the right type of information. This is especially true for companies in the IT industry, where the assumption of high technical fluency is assumed. In your customers' mind, how could an IT company not have a great website? It's crucial that your website puts your best foot forward.

So what makes a website excellent? It should have a distinct and professional visual presence, it should load fast, and it should follow a number of established UX best practices for object placement and information hierarchy. Here is a brief overview of the most important points:

- Keep your website simple and consistent
- Maintain a clear visual hierarchy
- Employ color and contrast to direct the eye
- Ensure your site is responsive and renders well on mobile
- Place a clear call-to-action (CTA) above the fold
- Include social proof (with names and photos)

But a good looking website is useless if it doesn't tell your brand's story in the most appealing way possible. This is why good copywriting is key. Copywriting is an art that is constantly evolving to keep pace with new technologies and new media, but there are also many time-honored techniques that you can employ to reliably keep your reader engaged and interested. Let's explore some of the key elements, and how they apply to IT service firms.

Captivate with Better Headlines

Attractive headlines are a vital element in any type of marketing material, and website headlines are no exception. Don't fall into cliché or laziness when crafting the headlines and sub-headlines on each of your key pages. A creative, eye-catching headline has the power to stick in a prospects mind and makes your value proposition memorable long after he or she has left your site.

Creating good headlines can be a challenge in the realm of IT services where the concepts and solutions involved can be quite complex. Of course you want to come across serious, but a number of recent studies have shown that B2B buyers also have a high degree of emotional connection to their vendors and service providers—higher in fact than B2C consumers^(1,2). This means that you don't want to come off too cold either or you risk not making a solid connection.

1. <https://www.thinkwithgoogle.com/articles/promotion-emotion-b2b.html>
2. <https://www.oktopost.com/blog/b2b-marketing-emotions/>

Did you know?

61% of the most successful content marketers have a documented strategy, while only 2% of the least successful have one. (CMI)

B2B brands that connect with their buyers on an emotional level earn twice the impact over marketers who are still trying to sell business or functional value. (LinkedIn Pulse)

Headlines with 6-13 words attract the highest and most consistent amount of traffic. (Hubspot)

Not surprisingly, this research confirms that the emotions involved in B2B purchases are different than those involved in B2C ones, with traits like "credibility," "partnership," and "stability" being most important. This should inform how we create headlines. We have the rest of our collateral to convince people we're the best logical option, but that's not what headlines do.

What do they do? According to expert copywriter Bob Bly, good headlines should achieve four goals: get attention, select an audience, deliver a complete message, and draw the reader into the body copy. Makes sense right? Another great reference point for shaping your headline is to start with the techniques of Michael Masterson, who has outlined the following four requirements of a good headline.

- **Uniqueness:** Even if it's in some small way, try to find some way in which your product or service is different than the competition.
- **Usefulness:** Your content should be useful, and the headline should reflect that to get your visitors interested in your company.
- **Ultra-specificity:** Be as precise as possible about the ways in which you're being useful. Generalities are a dime a dozen. Can you anticipate your customer's pain points? If you can, market to them.
- **Urgency:** Can you give your prospective client a reason to embrace your services or solutions now? It helps if you can.

There are some interesting differences between the two systems, so try to combine them in interesting ways to stoke your creative fire and achieve a great result. Regardless of whose guidelines you choose to follow, what's most important is that all headlines should be written with your client's needs in mind. Resist the urge to talk about what you can do, but emphasize instead how you can solve their problems. We'll discuss this idea in greater depth below.

Educate with Body Copy

In general, you want to keep your body copy concise and squarely on message. Most of your prospects will be scanning your website the first time they visit, and it's important that every visitor can quickly get the content they want without having to wade through dreary copy.

The main rule is to keep them reading. Remember the old copywriting adage: "What's the primary job of the first sentence? To get the reader to read the next sentence." That applies to almost every part of your website. Don't bother your reader with too many technical details until they've specifically requested them.

Below is some verbiage that I've wrestled with in the past. Do any of those problem phrases seem familiar? If so, your body copy may be driving potential clients away, or worse yet letting them go to your competitors.

Problematic Copy

At XYZ, we understand the issues that small businesses face in attempting to purchase, monitor and maintain their IT infrastructure. We provide a range of cost-effective tech support, computer maintenance and managed IT services for small and mid-size companies that will help you save time, protect and manage data more effectively, and increase staff productivity. [Click here to learn more why you should hire XYZ.](#)

We monitor everything from anti-virus, to event logs, to patch and security update availability. We even test and whitelist updates before applying them to your systems.

Our core competencies include:
End to End Infrastructure Managed Services,
Exchange Server Support, Cisco Programming,
Windows Server Consulting, Cloud Migration,
Virtual Server and .NET Consultants

XYZ is the Plainsville area's only Tier 3 datacenter, offering enterprise-level technology combined with the customized service you would find at a boutique. We specialize in working with companies that handle sensitive data, have strict governmental compliance requirements, and need flexible service plans.

Effective Headlines For IT Services

Headline writing is an art, here are some of our favorite.

Ask a question - "Why Struggle with IT Procurement?"

Give news - "New VOIP System Can Save you Money"

Tell a story - "It All Started with a One Computer"

State a benefit - "Database Management, Made Easier."

Show ROI - "Safeguard Data and Immediately Cut Costs"

Issue a challenge - "Is Your Business Ready for Disaster?"

Address a concern - "Hackers Won't Stand a Chance."

Achieve a goal - "Find the Efficiency You Always Wanted."

Explanation

This body copy has it a bit backwards. Don't say what you do first, sell your benefits first or else you waste the opportunity to touch your client emotionally. Also, this could be restated to make it much briefer and more "punchy"

Avoid technical jargon on your main page. Your customers are probably not familiar with these terms, and you risk losing them with too many details.

Each of these should be set off into a small paragraph or list, with a description of each one that focuses on their usefulness to the client. Better still, is there a more attractive, client-centered way to express those concepts? I suspect there is.

What's a tier 3 data center? You might know, but there's a good chance their customer doesn't. What exactly is enterprise-level technology? A boutique what? There are a number of ways that this could be more clear and powerful.

Sharp Solution Briefs

If by following these rules you come to discover that much of the technical information you want to share with potential clients is getting pushed off you webpages in favor of top-of-the-funnel, customer-focused content, then you're right.

Well-written solution briefs will help provide potential clients with a more in-depth view of your products and services. Moreover, they fit nicely into a small PDF file that is easy to share, makes great leave-behind collateral, and will help reduce clutter your website.

Solution briefs present an argument as to why a service or solution is the ideal way to tackle a given business problem. Unlike the very comprehensive white paper, which is an in-depth analysis of a specific problem, your solution briefs should embrace their role as marketing-oriented documents and be as persuasive as they can reasonably be.

There lies the complexity inherent in crafting a really great solution brief. You are going to talk in a more technical, detailed way about your service offering, while trying to maintain the attractive tenor of good marketing collateral.

When creating a great solution brief, all the rules of great copywriting apply. Aim for a lively, personal tone that is authoritative and educational. Here are some tips and ideas you can use in order to create solution briefs that inspire respect and interest.

Building Out Your Content Ecosystem

You've just taken your first step toward developing a content ecosystem, which once finely tuned will help you generate and nurture leads—and close sales—with much greater frequency and reliability.

Not all IT service providers have the will or resources to go “all in” with content marketing. Many work in local or hyper-local markets, or with a very specific range of clients. For some of those companies a well-functioning website, maybe a corporate brochure, and a few press releases might be enough to keep them going.

If that's you, that's great. You can market yourself with minimal content and rely on word of mouth and references for the rest of your growth. But in this guide I'm going to try to illustrate as much of the bigger picture as possible, and that means exploring what an “all pistons firing” approach to effective marketing communications looks like, one that includes long-form content, email, social media, video, direct mail and more.

Key Points

- Include a strong headline and sub-headline to drive reader's interest down into the body copy.
- Summarize your key selling points or benefits on the first page so readers can find the most important information without reading into the body copy.
- Structure the body copy to explain the solution benefits in order of their value to your customer, and layer the benefits in order to provide depth. Place each benefit under its own headline. Keep paragraphs short and easily digestible.
- Address objections. Each customer persona comes with its own list of hangups, preferences, and potential sticking points that can prevent them from moving down your pipeline. Address those concerns on your website and in further depth in your solution briefs.
- Create an interesting layout with the flow of text. Utilize callouts, columns, or bold and italicized text in order to break up tedious passages and improve readability. Some studies have shown that reading on a computer screen may impede the comprehension of long texts.
- Reformat dense technical information and statistics as graphs, charts, or diagrams. This provide a visual rest for the eye, makes the brief more dynamic, and help keep your body copy flowing along smoothly.
- Include customer testimonials or other forms of social proof into the solution brief to increase credibility and readability. Include names and pictures if possible.
- Keep solution briefs accessible to all visitors to maximize their effectiveness as a top-of-funnel marketing collateral.
- Include relevant contact information prominently at the top and bottom.

Did you know?

68% of B2B marketers rank “generating high-quality leads” as their top priority for this year. But nearly 60% also rank this as their biggest challenge, and just 16% of marketers rate their lead generation efforts as “extremely” effective. (Webbiquity)

47% of buyers viewed 3-5 pieces of content before engaging with a sales rep. (Hubspot)

Today's business buyers do not contact suppliers directly until 57 percent of the purchase process is complete.

Join us in part two, “Optimizing Long-form Content for Authority and Appeal,” to learn how to create content that earns you a larger, and more targeted audience.

- Write better white papers to generate more leads and greater authority
- Create case studies that differentiate your firm from the competition
- Disaggregate long-form content pieces for distribution across marketing channels
- Expand your brand story to build a deeper customer connection
- Much more!

Charles Comenos is a copywriter and content consultant working in the IT industry. Contact him at charles@phosmarcom.com with questions, comments, or for help creating superior marketing content.